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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CAIRO 007418

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [KPAL](#) [MOPS](#) [EG](#) [IS](#)

SUBJECT: EGYPT-GAZA BORDER: GOE UPDATE SEPTEMBER 24

Classified by ECPO Minister Counselor Michael Corbin for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

1. (C) Summary: During a September 24 meeting, NEA Deputy Assistant Secretary Elizabeth Dibble and General Emir and Colonel Osama of the Liaison Agency with International Organizations (LAWIO) discussed the situation at the Egypt-Gaza border, the reason for the confusion following IDF withdrawal, and plans for building a new terminal at Kerem Shalom. General Emir confirmed that the GOE reopened the Rafah terminal to allow approximately 1,000 Palestinians to return to Gaza and to allow Egyptians to return home, but said the GOE intended to close the terminal at 0600 on Sunday September 25. Thereafter, General Emir said, the GOE will consider on a case by case basis Palestinian requests to enter Egypt for humanitarian reasons. Colonel Osama said that the GOE is waiting for Israel to fix the location of its Kerem Shalom crossing before it begins planning a terminal in Egypt. End summary.

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Border update-September 24  
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2. (C) General Emir and Colonel Osama of LAWIO advised DAS Dibble during their September 24th meeting that the GOE opened the gate outside the Rafah Terminal on Friday and would close it at 0600 on September 25 after allowing Palestinians who were able to prove their identity with a passport or identification card to return to Gaza and Egyptians to return to Egypt. (Note: In a follow-up conversation on September 25, a LAWIO officer said the GOE closed the gate on September 24 at 1830. End note.) General Emir noted that representatives from the Palestinian Authority, the GOI, and the Egyptian General Intelligence Service (EGIS) would be present at the Rafah terminal to coordinate this effort. General Emir said that following the "reclosure" of Rafah, the GOE will consider on a case by case basis Palestinian requests to enter Egypt for humanitarian reasons, such as medical treatment, and will treat as criminals any Palestinians remaining in Egypt illegally. It is in the GOE interest, Colonel Osama stressed, to preserve stability in Egypt and ensure that there is no smuggling.

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Plans for the future unclear  
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3. (C) The DAS noted that Palestinian contacts had cautioned that closing Rafah would increase tension in Gaza. General Emir agreed but explained that negotiations on reopening the border would be conducted on a political level -- through General Soliman of EGIS. From LAWIO's perspective, according to General Emir, the reopening may come in phases. First, the Rafah crossing could be reopened to traffic from Gaza to Egypt. Next, General Emir said he could foresee third party monitoring of a Rafah crossing for both people and goods. General Emir predicted that in a final stage, Kerem Shalom would be opened for three way (Gaza-Egypt-Israel) traffic. Colonel Osama acknowledged that the GOE has not yet started to construct any new facilities opposite Kerem Shalom. Colonel Osama said that when he asked his Israeli counterpart about GOI plans for the crossing, he said they are still in the "drafting on paper" phase. Until the Israelis fix the location of their terminal, Colonel Osama noted, the GOE will not start planning their own. Colonel Osama confirmed that the Kerem Shalom crossing will be for goods only, and Rafah will be for people because it would not be right for the Palestinians to have to use the Kerem Shalom crossing to enter Egypt.

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The cause of the confusion  
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4. (C) Colonel Osama blamed the recent border confusion on the sudden departure of the IDF on September 11-12. The deal, Osama said, was that the GOE would begin deploying its Border Guard Forces (BGF) on September 15 and have them in place by October 15. Osama said that his IDF counterpart told him that the IDF was to remain in the Philadelphia strip until the end of 2005, but definitely would not leave before the end of October. The IDF pull-out took place without any coordination with the GOE, Colonel Osama and General Emir said. This left the GOE with two options to control the tide

of Palestinians entering Egypt -- they could fire on them and provoke public outrage or exercise self control, increase the number of police in the area, and allow the Palestinians a period of celebration. The GOE opted for the second option, Colonel Osama explained, because they believed the bulk of the Palestinians were coming to celebrate the "end of 38 years of oppression," to reunite with family members living in Egypt, and to buy goods both for resale in Gaza and for Ramadan. "We do not," Colonel Osama stressed, consider such people "infiltrators."

15. (C) Colonel Osama said that, in his opinion, the IDF withdrew without notice and before the BGF deployment in breach of their agreement in order to embarrass the Egyptians. The IDF, he said, also wanted to show that the Palestinians have no control over their people and prove to the international community that the IDF needs to remain in the Philadelphi strip to prevent smuggling and preserve security. As for smuggling, Colonel Osama said that there was some sign that arms and ammunition smuggling occurred before the BGF deployment. However, the Israeli allegation that seven missiles were smuggled into Gaza was unsupported by evidence, according to Colonel Osama. There are not even seven such missiles on the open market, he observed, so they would need to come from the MoD directly.

16. (C) Israeli press criticism of the GOE handling of the border situation, Colonel Osama said, was both confusing and frustrating. He noted that cooperation with Israeli liaison has always been good, and the condemnation of the GOE was inconsistent with the messages exchanged privately between the parties. The DAS agreed that the press coverage of the matter did not square with the comments she had heard from GOI officials regarding the excellent cooperation between the GOI and GOE on this issue.

17. (U) The DAS did not have an opportunity to clear this message.

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JONES